

INTERVIEW WITH ANNA KERNAHAN, CLIMATE STRIKE ACTIVIST

1. Why did you decide to get involved in the climate strikes and why are they important to you?

I decided to get involved in the climate strikes because, as I am under 18, I am not able to have a vote in the decisions that will affect my future and so I feel as though I have a moral duty to try and influence the adults who are voting on mine and my generation's behalf. I have been enlightened to the severity of the climate crisis due to reading about Greta Thunberg and 'Fridays' for Future' and reading documents such as the 'IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) special report on climate change' (IPCC, 2018). The best available science is telling us that this is an emergency, but there's no mainstream education on this, so getting involved in the climate strikes is a way of raising awareness of the research from the scientists.

They are important to me because the climate crisis truly terrifies me and, before I joined the climate strikes, I felt completely helpless in this fight. However, this gives children a chance to take the lead where the people in power are failing. I have made my closest friends through the movement from all over the world and they are my second family. Climate activism has become my entire life and so it is very important to me.

2. How supportive has your school been to your participation in the climate strikes?

Not very supportive at all. At first it was a straight 'no', but when they realised I was just going to do it anyway, I was reluctantly allowed. I have to wear a hoodie underneath my blazer to cover up my school tie and I have to come into school on Fridays first and then leave at break-time to go to the strike location. However, individual teachers have been very supportive of it by helping me catch up on missed work and taking an interest in what we have been doing. Those few teachers know who they are and they are the ones that make the whole thing bearable. I honestly hate striking, but I have no other choice. This

sounds strange, but would you like to sit on a cold stone slab for hours in the rain every single week that you only need to do because others aren't doing their jobs properly?

3. How important is the participation of civil society organisations in the climate strikes?

Very. Every single person is welcome and truly needed in this fight for climate action. All organisations and movements alike need to unite behind the science together.

4. What can politicians do about climate change?

A massive amount. We rely quite heavily on politicians to create change as we need system change to stop this crisis. Things like the Paris Agreement (UN Climate Change, 2015) and the Green New Deal (Klein, 2019) need political support to be implemented. We need politicians to hold each other accountable and ensure all new policy has considered the best available climate science alongside it. Political action and creating laws to stop emissions is needed to survive this crisis.

5. What should the climate change campaign do next to build support?

We need to sustain the major pressure we are currently putting on corporations and governments. This awareness raising is essential as people need to be educated on the crisis in order to want to act on it. However, we have run out of time to just educate people and hope they become enlightened and change on their own. Yes, education is vitally important but we need action to come alongside it. We need to put pressure on the world leaders and the people in power to prove to them that we are never going to stop until we see positive action from them. COP26, now postponed to 2021, will be a pivotal moment for us and hopefully a young person from Northern Ireland will be there this time to represent what we need and join the call for action.

References

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2018) 'Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 °C', available: <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/> (accessed 18 April 2020).

Klein, N (2019) *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*, Penguin: London and New York.

United Nations Climate Change (2015) 'The Paris Agreement', available: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement> (accessed 18 April 2020).

Anna Kernahan is 17 years old, lives in Northern Ireland and is a climate activist with 'Fridays' for Future'.